

“The space between the lines”: Ambivalent Discourse in Non-democratic Regimes
– Research proposal –

Introduction

Is there any other form of alternative public sphere in totalitarian regimes apart from that created by underground activities? Totalitarianism studies commonly focus on the characteristics of the strictly controlled public sphere and on the underground activities that represent a way out from this control. However, based on some slightly developed references in the social sciences literature, and on a considerable amount of philologically oriented studies, it seems that there is another possibility for challenging the state control: the ambivalent discourse. Roughly defined, ambivalent discourse emerges under state censorship; it implies encoding the texts and demanding the public to interpret it, to read between the lines. Borrowing the architectural metaphor of Miklós Haraszti, when the public sphere is controlled by censorship, “the space between the lines” becomes the realm where “real communication”, in other words, a public life takes place (Haraszti 1987: 144–145).

According to the common usage, the practice of ambivalent discourse (sometimes called “double speech”, “gray rhetoric”, “equivocation”, etc.) is associated with the activity of politicians who use ambiguity purposefully to accomplish their goals. Thus, the speakers use intentionally ambiguous texts because they allow divergent interpretations to coexist and this way they are more effective than straightforward speech in ensuring various groups to work together, and, of course, to attract voters. In the simplest way, this strategic ambiguity can be characterized as non-straightforward communication, which appears contradictory, tangential, obscure or even evasive (Bull 2000: 222–223). Although the ambivalent discourse practiced in non-democratic regimes shares some of these characteristics, it has to be highlighted that its scope is not some kind of manipulation in the sense presented before, but it represents an act of resistance against the state control, since the ambivalence introduced is meant to ensure that the message addressed to the public passes the censorship.

My analysis aims at describing and understanding of how the ambivalent discourse works. Although my arguments contest certain claims of the studies dealing with totalitarian political systems, namely, an alternative public sphere emerges when easing of the grip of terror, the analysis actually contributes to a wider field of research, the public sphere and oppositional activities of non-democratic regimes in general, since every type and subtype of non-democratic regimes employs some kind of censorship.

Since my research is of exploratory nature, the project sets some rather broad aims: to conceptualize ambivalent discourse as a form of resistance and based on empirical research to describe how does it work. This means to analyze the changes and variations of ambivalent discourse, hence, to identify the influencing factors to this practice. To accomplish this goal I have designed the research to include a critical case study: the ambivalent discourse in Romania in the socialist period. Due to the conceptual setting, in terms of methods, the research uses the methodological framework of discourse analysis.

The relevance of analyzing ambivalent discourse is twofold. First, one can get a deeper insight to the structure of the public sphere of totalitarian regimes and how this public sphere worked. More precisely, this analysis would strengthen the claim that there was an alternative public sphere even in cases where no underground activity can be detected, an issue that it is overlooked by the majority of totalitarianism studies. Second, in spite of the fact that it does not appear to be a live issue, actually it is. And this claim is not based on the fact that censorship in different forms and degrees is present in democratic systems too, but on the fact that there are still many non-democratic states where this kind of resistance may be practiced. Nevertheless, a retrospective analysis seems more ethical, since every effort to highlight the usage of ambivalent discourse works against the authors of the oppositional messages and it is an indirect appeal to the system's vigilance.¹

1. Theoretical framework and the research questions

This section clarifies some terms employed in this research and contains the state of the art concerning the practice of ambivalent discourse as a form of resistance against state control. The ultimate aim is to set the bases of the research questions. First I briefly develop the concepts of “public sphere” and “alternative public sphere”, than I turn to discuss the main hypotheses regarding the emergence of the alternative public sphere and its manifestations, and finally I highlight the shortcomings of the relevant literature.

The mainstream theoretical perspective on the concept of “public sphere” is given by Habermas, who defined it as a discursive sphere situated between the private sphere (more exactly the “civil society”) and the state, where the public or body of private individuals join in debate of issues bearing on state authority (Habermas (1962) 1989). Besides being a

¹ One can consider here the effects of the Western radio broadcasts from the cold war period, especially the programs of the USA-backed *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, which by its thoroughly made analysis for decoding contemporary works from Communist countries and its reports on public reactions served as a “reliable” source for the Romanian authorities, which in its own turn took repressive measures against the authors (Ionescu 1987).

historical-sociological account about the emergence, transformation and disintegration of the bourgeois public sphere, the work carries strong normative appeals too. In a nutshell, a public sphere adequate to a democratic polity depends on both the quality of discourse and quantity of participation, that is, the rational critical argumentation and its inclusive nature or openness to political participation.

It is clear that, according to this approach, the analysis of the “public sphere” of non-democratic regimes is beside the point, since in the sense of undistorted communication between private citizens simply does not exist.² This is due to the practice of censorship, which in its traditional/legal sense is the “[...] authoritarian control over what reaches the public sphere by someone other than the sender and the intended receiver of a message, [it] operates on the basis of official regulation (if not legislation), institutionalization, and administration of the control procedures (Müller 2004: 12). It has to be mentioned, that in spite of marked differences in their ultimate objectives, for instance, demobilizing or mobilizing the society (Linz 2000: 159–168), the totalitarian and authoritarian regimes do not differ in their relationship to public sphere. Both are characterized by heavy-handed efforts to structure selective flows of information to the general public (Mughan and Gunther 2000: 4). The media is monopolized by different means and state censorship is applied in order to maintain the hegemonic discourse in the realm of politics.

Nevertheless, due to the fact that the analytical distinction between the private and public realms, the public sphere and the state administration remains uncontested, to distinguish the variant of public sphere of non-democratic regimes from the classical sense of responsible, general debate on public matters, commentators have introduced the qualifier of “official” public sphere, which it is often replaced by adjectives like “socialist-”, “party-”, “formal-” etc. (see Silberman 1997: 8). Following the Habermasian logic, some sort of “genuine” public sphere might appear in non-democratic regimes as a discursive field contesting the official public discourse. This is usually denominated as the “alternative public

² It has to be mentioned that the critics of the Habermasian conception contest its analytical pertinence for democratic systems as well. For instance, Fraser suggests that the notion of the public sphere is *de facto* a multitude of different competing publics (Fraser 1992). She argues that access to and participation in the public sphere is not universal but it is based on the value system of the dominant culture and the power elite, and there is a hegemonic relationship between different groups and their public spheres (*subaltern counterpublics*). Fraser identifies a range of “alternative” public spheres on different axes such as class, gender, power and profession. Furthermore, the claim that the public sphere is a space of discursive circulation opposed to censorship and other forms of state interference became a highly contested issue as well. According to the opponents of Habermasian conception, the public sphere constitutes a censored and censoring space, since criticism just like state censorship legitimizes and – in the same time – delegitimizes certain discourses (Burt 1994: xviii–xix). In sum, instead of imagining the public sphere as a compact and homogeneous unit between the private sphere and the state, a better analytical approach is to speak about competing publics with competing discourses.

sphere”, thus, the “alternative” of the official public sphere. This one has multiple appellations too, like “second-” or “counter public sphere”, “alternative-” or “contra system”, “parallel-”, “independent-”, “shadow-” or “underlying society”, etc. (see Hankiss 1990: 83–84; Falk 2003). Due to the restrictions imposed by the state, this kind of public sphere is often characterized as “semiprivate autonomous space” (Silberman 1997: 25).

What are the conditions for the emergence of alternative public sphere and how does it manifest itself? It seems to be a consensus in the field of researches dealing with the Soviet type Communist regimes, that the emergence of the alternative public sphere is causally linked to the post-totalitarian experimentation with some kind of politics of liberalization, when political repression and censorship norms slowly relaxed (Brown 1988: 20–22, Hankiss 1990: 82–107, Schöpflin 1993: 262–267, Sükösd 2000: 124–140; Tismăneanu 1992: 134).³ According to Sükösd, several phases can be distinguished in this process: the period of “selective repression”, when a sensitive dynamic of cultural politics developed gradually, based on “the symbolic resistance resulting from shared generational language and set of understandings” (Sükösd 2000: 134), this being followed by the period of “dual system” when the official political communication and entertainment (not openly political) programs were doubled by their illegal versions, circulated throughout the underground networks of intellectuals (e.g. clandestine publication of written, visual and audio materials). The majority of the empirical studies focuses on this second period of public resistance, and explores the specific illegal or semi-illegal activities, samizdat writing, underground clubs, and the activity of different pressure groups, etc. (Bugajski and Pollack 1989, Falk 2003).

Besides these analyses, there is another, in terms of its dimensions much smaller branch of studies in the field of political science, exploring another form of resistance, that is, ambivalent discourse (Lőrincz 2004). This holds that, in spite of the fact that the Communist regimes were careful enough to control public discourse by censorship, the unspoken common background of knowledge made possible the transmission of certain information behind this institution by presenting the forbidden issues in encrypted texts. Moreover, although the encryption could have been very sophisticated, the ambivalent discourse was still used at large and the public still understood or assumed to understand the messages (Lőrincz 2004). It has to be mentioned that references to this form of opposition against the official discourse are not rare in studies dealing with the “proper” alternative public sphere either, which is embodied in the underground activities, however, these are just short remarks, and its

³ Here the concept of “post-totalitarian” denotes the de-Stalinization process in the Soviet Union, which led to a considerable moderation of repression and propaganda in Central and Eastern Europe too.

appearance is set to the first liberalization wave of post-totalitarian regimes (Bozóki 1996: 444).

To make it clear, the main differences between the underground activities and the practice of ambivalent discourse is that the first is realized primarily through illegal ways, hence, avoiding the censorship, whereas the second makes use of the official media and cultural institutions. Consequently, the underground activities can criticize directly different aspects of the political life, while the ambivalent discourse implies the usage of an encoded or as it is most frequently called “Aesopian language”.

The label of “Aesopian language” is primarily used in the domain of philology, and it can be defined as “[...] an utterance, used strategically, which by means of various discursive devices, may generate a second semantic level of speech, i.e. a hidden layer, [...] with the implicit content or subtext that is officially undesirable or forbidden” (Savinitch 2005: 109). Nevertheless, the analysis of this phenomenon is not restricted to the field of linguistics, literary critique, and the history of literature, but it is employed in various fields, such as social history, sociology of culture, sociology of communication, and others.

Regarding the prevalence of the usage of the “Aesopian language”, one might conclude that it emerged in a wide variety of historical and socio-political conditions in the domain of arts (music, theatre, and film), literature, and political writings. For example, there are analyses that bring evidences from early modern England (Patterson 1984), tsarist Russia (Loseff 1984, Zholkovsky 1994), in the Soviet Union (Horton (ed.) 1993, Tyrrell 2001) and the Communist regimes of Central and Eastern Europe (Falkowska 1996, Lőrincz 2004), Indonesia under Suharto’s New Order (Clark 2001), theatrical life in nowadays Iran (Article 19: 2006), apartheid South Africa and different postcolonial African states like Ghana under Nkrumah, Malawi under Banda, and Zaire (Negash 2003; Drewett and Cloonan (eds.) 2006), Mubarak’s Egypt (Ali 2003), in Communist China (De Baets 2001), and Syria under the rule of the Baath Party (Wedeen 1999). All of the authors consider the usage of “Aesopian language” a form of opposition under the constraint of censorship against the hegemonic discourse in the realm of politics.

Why “ambivalent discourse” and not “Aesopian language”? Actually there is a much wider range of expressions denoting the very similar phenomenon, which are often used interchangeably, for instance, “double speech/talk”, “oblique discourse/language”, “elliptical discourse”, “indirect discourse”, “equivocation”, and others. I prefer to use the term “ambivalent discourse”, which is one of the most rarely used terms, for the following reasons: first, some of the denominations frequently used in different scientific areas may introduce

unwanted connotations, for example “equivocation” coins a sort of logical fallacy (Powers 1995: 287-301), while “elliptical (structures in spoken) discourse” refers to omitted words that can be reconstructed from the context (Thanasoulas 2005: 26). Second, the term “discourse” is much broader than “language”, “speech”, or “text”, since encompasses social practices. Thus, by using the term “discourse” I can depart from structuralist theorizing which dominates the area of language and semiotic theory (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999: 37–52). Third, the adjective “ambivalent” seems appropriate, because it highlights the essence of this practice, namely, there are some texts or performances that allow for divergent interpretations: according to certain frames of reference they meet the official standards, whereas applying other frames of reference results in messages that are forbidden to appear in the official public sphere (Lőrincz 2004).

Although a considerable literature deals with the issue of the alternative public sphere in the non-democratic regimes, several shortcomings can be underlined. First, the focus of the studies dealing with (post-)totalitarian regimes is mainly on underground activities, and there is a complete absence of large scale and reliable empirical research concerning the practice of ambivalent discourse. What we know about it is mainly based on personal experiences and conjectures circulating in the informal networks of the 70’s and 80’s recalled by different analysts,⁴ and some hints in the analyses regarding dissidence activity.

Second, the appearance of the alternative public sphere is causally linked to the post-totalitarian liberalization. I do not attempt to contradict these studies in terms that underground activities make their appearance under the specified conditions, rather to complement them, by arguing that the potential of resisting control over the public sphere exist in periods of complete repression too in the form of ambivalent discourse. As it was argued, the practice of ambivalent discourse also carries the potential to generate an alternative public sphere; nevertheless, its emergence does not necessarily presuppose concessions coming from the authorities.

The third objection concerns the philologically oriented studies. The researchers reconstruct the social-political conditions in which a particular work emerged and basically reinterpret them in an attempt to reveal the encoded “revolutionary” messages. Although they might serve with sophisticated analyses of discursive devices that create the second level of interpretation, and information about the nature of the political system, the function of censoring institutions, etc., the major shortcoming of this approach is that it offers no

⁴ See the examples invoked by Sükösd, Bozóki and Lőrincz (Sükösd 1992: 133–134; Bozóki 1996: 444; Lőrincz 2004:161–168).

knowledge about how the contemporary audiences/readers related to these works. Hence, we cannot really talk about ambivalent discourse, since the evidences for interpretation made by the public, the discursive events related to particular works are scarcely reported.

These gaps in the literature guide us to empirical and theoretical questions:

1. How does ambivalent discourse work? Is there any congruence between the interpretation of the authors, authorities and the public? How pervasive is the usage of ambivalent discourse in a particular society under a repressive regime?
2. What are the characteristic elements of the alternative public sphere of totalitarian regimes created by the practice of ambivalent discourse?
3. If there are any variances and changes in usage and the structure/content of ambivalent discourse, why?

At this point only one influencing factor is identified: the censorship practices. From the point of view of permission, under censorship there are neutral, tolerated and prohibited topics (Lőrincz 2004: 156). However, it is held that the boundaries of the realm of prohibited topics are often arbitrary, usually not fixed, and liable to change. The reasons underlined in the literature are the following (Schöpflin 1983, Boyer 2003): different international or domestic events shape the content of topics brought under censorship; and the institutional changes can make the control more moderate or more effective and arbitrary. Logically, as the censorship gets more rigorous the available set of keywords and topics diminishes, and the encryption becomes more sophisticated, abstract. However, it might be added that as the control is stricter (and the means for cultural production are more centralized) the possibility for underground activities diminishes and the only way of resistance remains the practice of ambivalent discourse.

2. Research design

Critical case study – ambivalent discourse in Romania (1948–1989)

The research is designed in a way to include a critical case study. Theoretically this is achieved while constructing a case that should function under the most extreme conditions imposed to “Theory 1” and “Theory 2”, nevertheless, the first is falsified and the second confirmed (Gerring 1998). In the case of the study of ambivalent discourse this means that accounts of totalitarianism studies that deny or overlook the existence of an alternative public sphere and those studies that link its appearance to the decline of state control (T₁) are

falsified if its existence is proved in the case of a strongly totalitarian regime, which would be accommodated by the theory dealing with ambivalent discourse (T₂).

Taking into account that one of the aims of the research is to identify the influencing factors to the practice of ambivalent discourse, it is clear that the research design should help disentangling their effects. A comparative dimension is needed to control for the impact of institutions, as well as for other possible influencing factors. In my research I choose to keep the institutions constant at any cross-sectional point of analysis, however, the longitudinal nature of the research allows for the assessment of the institutional changes in the practice of censorship, an important influencing factor thus far identified.

The proposed case is the ambivalent discourse practiced in Romania during socialism (1948–1989). The reason to select Romania is that it is considered a salient case for totalitarianism among the Central and Eastern European socialist states. In the period of Communist rule there were variations across time and countries in the manner of how the power was exercised, thus reform oriented and anti-reformist trends alternated differently, but the late 70's and 80's may be generally described as a period of gradual erosion of totalitarian control and strengthening of the alternative public sphere. However, this period of disintegration, was not present in Romania. Institutionalized terror has been practiced by the secrete police (*Securitate*) until the collapse of the system, being so pervasive that no organized underground activity, mass movement or durable pressure group could have developed (Bugajski and Pollack 1989, Deletant 1995).⁵ This is not to say that the Romanian Communist regime did not change over time or there is a complete absence of challenging the political system. According to historical accounts, however, the period of relative liberalization is restrained to the years between 1965 and 1971,⁶ this being followed by a shift to a full fledged totalitarian control over the society. The sporadic public unrests, like

⁵ In Romania there were just two *samizdat* journals, both being the product of intellectuals of the Hungarian minority. The most successful, *Ellenpontok* (Counterpoints), managed to have nine issues published between 1981 and 1983, while the second one, *Kiáltó szó* (Loud Word) had only two issues. The first six issues of *Ellenpontok* were hardly circulated, they were produced only in five copies and the editors showed them to only three or four people in Romania. From issue seven more copies were made but still, it came to be known to people first of all through the presentations of *Radio Free Europe*. (Lőrincz 2004: 163–164)

⁶ In 1965 Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej dies and Nicolae Ceaușescu becomes the leader of the Party. Politically, an obvious detachment from Moscow was tried, and the refusal of the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 (in which all the countries from the Warsaw Treaty participated), brought Ceaușescu a considerable international prestige. 1971 is known as the year of the “July Theses”. Returning from a trip made to China and North Korea, inspired by the hardline model found there, Ceaușescu delivered the speech entitled *Proposed measures for the improvement of political-ideological activity, of the Marxist-Leninist education of Party members, of all working people*. The “July Theses” marked the breaking with the former reconciliation strategy towards the society and the return to a hard-line dictatorial policy. Strict ideological conformity was demanded, which meant more propaganda, more censorship, and less cultural autonomy. (Deletant 1995)

worker's demonstrations, outspoken statements of intellectuals or group of intellectuals, were effectively suppressed and severely retaliated.

The repressive apparatus was supplemented by an extensive censoring network. Although censorship was officially abolished in 1977, in fact only his office, the *Press and Printing Directorate* set up in 1948, was closed down. Its scope of activities were overtaken by the *Council for Culture and Socialist Education* (CSCE), which has become the main institution for the censorship of printed material, and it was also directly responsible for everything to do with culture (Boyle 1988: 204–207). By this act censorship was effectively decentralized. Now, since there were censors in all cultural institutions, censorship has not only maintained its previous power but has become even more pervasive, because it acted at all stages of the editorial process. A number of new filters have been introduced, the main categories being: pre-censorship, censorship of the manuscript, and post-censorship (Ștefănescu 1988). The pre-censorship meant checking the author's dossier; the censorship implied the work of pre-reading, reading and post-reading committees on the manuscript, whereas the post-censorship involved the removal of already printed books from bookstores and libraries. This phase implied checking the reactions of the public and the reports of international agencies (e.g. *Radio Free Europe*), and in case some message was interpreted as offending to the regime, the books were either pulped or some pages were removed. Generally the punishment also included banning all the works of the “culpable” author, and police harassment for a long time.⁷ This close supervision was applied not just to printed materials, but different domains of culture as well. For example, the directors of the theatres must submit their repertoire for approval to a plethora of authorities, including the local Party committees, the CCSE, and in some cases, for the highest party authorities (Ștefănescu 1989).

Turning back to the methodological considerations, the rationale for selecting Romania is that it provides a least-likely case for the occurrence of an alternative public sphere understood in traditional way of expressing oppositional activities, as censorship and political terror are brought to the extreme. If even under such circumstances an alternative public sphere develops by the practice of ambivalent discourse, then we have good reasons to believe that under more favorable conditions the practice of ambivalent discourse would manifest itself too. Furthermore, if the practice of ambivalent discourse can be identified in

⁷ Sometimes there were lunched purges of larger dimensions, for example in July 1988 the Government issued an order according to which all libraries had to withdraw all books of 34 authors and all references to them had to be removed from the catalogues (Ștefănescu 1988).

Romania under very strict Communist state control, those accounts which link its appearance to the erosion of totalitarian control are proved to be wrong.

There are several writings which point to the existence of ambivalent discourse in Romania during the Communist period. It was present in the Hungarian language sphere (Lőrincz 2004) as well as in the Romanian one (Otoiu 2003, Sorokin 2002, Rad 1995, Vianu 1998). Most of the attention is paid to the so called *Generation of the Eighties*, that time a young generation of authors, using a language thick in metaphor, double-sense, and allusion. The primary sources used in these analyses are interviews with the authors, their writings and memoirs. Hence, the objection raised in the previous section of this paper against these kind of studies holds here too: although there are recurrent references to the authors' sense of complicity with the reader who was both able and willing to decipher intricate Aesopian references, and the textual analysis of particular works reveal certain interpretation possibilities, these remain mere assumptions in the lack of archival research that would confirm that there was indeed an interested public. Nevertheless, these studies offer sufficient basis for the plausibility of the present research's scope.

Finally, I briefly present one of the widely known incidents for a "lizard" escaping censors' notice, a story which may block in the usage of "Aesopian language", the reaction of the public, and of the authorities respectively. Ana Blandiana, one of the finest Romanian contemporary poets, published a book for children in 1988,⁸ which contained a poem entitled *Tomcat Arpagic* (Motanul Arpagic). The story of the conceited cat, according to the author, was meant to ridicule Ceaușescu's policies and manners (Franzen 2003).⁹ Somehow the joke was immediately found out, and her books were all sold in one day. The authorities quickly reacted; the book was banned, as well as all of her writings under edition and the formerly published works (Franzen 2003, Vianu 1998: 134–135).

⁸ The book is entitled *Events from my Street* (Întâmplări de pe strada mea).

⁹ Here is an illustrative fragment from the poem: "And when I said Arpagic / I think this is enough / So I do not need to explain / And you should know presently / Who this character is, / Whom I take the allowance / Of calling the most famous / Cat in town. / That / Poems have been dedicated to / And portraits have been painted of, / As is customary with the stars; // About whom, besides all other things, / Even cartoons have been made / Exciting and funny cartoons / Broadcast on TV in the afternoons. // Well, after all these fulfillments / Indubitable ones / And incredible, too, / Arpagic, as it would be expected of him, / Started putting on airs. // But it is no wonder: / When he goes out walking / All the street are excited / They crowd in to see him; // Window panes are opened, / Children forget about their homework, / Branches stoop over the fence, / The street is packed just as a boulevard, // Cars have / To slow down, / Everybody gazes at him / In a catlike manner, // They give him flowers, / Bread and salt, / A letter here and there / In an envelope / And everybody is shouting / << Arpagic! >>. // [...]. // Given this fairytale circumstance / I believe it is natural / That Arpagic is showing off / And he thinks that he is extraordinary." (Translated by Ilie Rad; Ilie Rad 1999)

Unit of analysis and methods

In examining ambivalent discourse the unit of analysis is the *discursive event related to one text or performance*. Put it differently, the unit of analysis is not the text itself but its contemporary interpretation. In order to identify the practice of ambivalent discourse the afterlife of a published text, a theatre performance or movie has to be analyzed. One has to examine whether or not the frames of reference used for interpretation differ from the officially allowed one. If they do differ, we can witness the emergence of an alternative discursive field, hence, an alternative public sphere.

Since the phenomenon under scrutiny is the ambivalent discourse, in terms of methods, the research uses the methodological framework of discourse analysis. The empirical data includes written text materials, such as official documents and speeches, domestic events, ideas and institutions serving as the context to the evolution of ambivalent discourse. More specifically, I will analyze the efforts of the authorities to control the public discourse and to eliminate subversive elements, such as texts with multiple interpretation possibilities, as well as the reactions of the public to particular texts and performances.

Sources

Apparently some problems with the sources for analyzing ambivalent discourse emerge from the fact that there are no general standards for deciding whether a work is encrypted or not. Furthermore, it follows from the nature of encryptions that they need no explanations, rather they are based on the common knowledge of the author and his/her presupposed public. As a consequence, by analyzing the particular works of the socialist period one can identify neither the content of the ambivalent discourse nor the changes that occurred. However, it would be totally misleading to adopt this strategy, because it would imply to give an account about my interpretation and not about the contemporary public who actually participated in the maintenance of the discourse. Since the interpretation is entirely context dependent, one can only deduce them from the contemporary reflections, critiques.

The primary sources that seem to provide the information about “how the public can interpret certain things” or “how the public interpreted certain things” are the critiques written before and after the publication/performance, which can be found in the archive materials of the institutions charged with censorship (censorship of the manuscripts and post-censorship). In Romania these are the following: the decisions of the *Press and Printing Directorate* (1948–1977) and of the *Council for Culture and Socialist Education* (1977–1989) the minutes of *County Commission(s) for Supervising Theatrical and Musical Performances*, and the

Writers' Union. Further data can be collected from the materials of the *National Council for the Study of the "Securitate" Archives (CNSAS)*. At the moment all these sources are public. Furthermore, I will supplement these data with information from interviews made with former censors and/or editors.

Concerning the validity of the data of censorship materials several objections can be raised. First, the censors generally acquire a vested interest in limiting information and interpret their brief in a highly restrictive fashion. Thus, even if there was nothing encrypted in the text, the censor could observe and delete something in order to be sure that the text is "clean" and to protect him/herself from the charge of complicity. As a consequence, one cannot be sure that censorship control is responsive to "real" interpretation possibilities of the public. Second, one cannot be sure that behind the "message" decoded by the public there is any real intention of the author. Regarding the first objection, I would remark that, on one hand, all kind of censorship considerations influence the practice of ambivalent discourse and pre-publishing censorship materials will serve primarily to understand the functioning of the censoring system. On the other hand, post-censorship is by definition a counter-reaction to the interpretations of the reading public or audience, thus, these data can be considered valid for the assessment of ambivalent discourse. Concerning the second objection, I do not consider this a real problem, since irrespectively from the author's original intentions ambivalent discourse can emerge as the public reacts to his/her work.

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